

In re) Fair Hearing No. M-07/08-318
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 Appeal of)

The petitioner appeals the decision by the Department for Children and Families, Economic Services Division denying her application for General Assistance (GA) for travel expenses and phone service. The issue is whether these items are covered under the GA regulations.

1. The petitioner is a single woman who has reportedly been homeless for several weeks. On July 14, 2008 she applied for GA from the Department's Barre office.¹ Following an "expedited" hearing held by phone that same day, the Department granted the petitioner GA for emergency temporary housing in a local motel.

2. Pursuant to the same application the Department denied the petitioner's request for GA to pay for a bus trip to Burlington to retrieve her mail and for payment of her

¹ The petitioner's appeals from denials of previous applications for GA are the subject of a separate fair hearing.

cell phone bill. A telephone hearing on these denials was held on July 17, 2008.

3. At the hearing the petitioner did not allege any medical or other emergency requiring either retrieval of her mail or payment of her cell phone bill. She maintains that she needs to pick up her mail because it may contain "medical documentation" relative to various claims for benefits she has pending. Although she feels she requires use of a cell phone, she has access to phone service at the motel where she is currently housed.²

ORDER

The Department's decision is affirmed.

REASONS

Under the regulations GA is available to meet certain "emergency needs". W.A.M. § 2600.3. The types of emergencies specified in the regulations include housing, food, acute medical care, fuel and utilities, and essential personal needs and incidentals. W.A.M. §§ 2610-2630. Neither cell phone service nor non-emergency transportation

²The petitioner participated in this hearing using the phone in her motel room.

is considered an emergency need, and neither is covered under the regulations.

The Board has recognized that what constitutes an emergency under the regulations can differ from the perceived needs of the individual requesting assistance. However, inasmuch as the petitioner has not demonstrated that her alleged needs for cell phone service and bus transportation are within the definition or contemplation of the GA program, the Board is bound to affirm the Department's decision. 3 V.S.A. § 3091(d), Fair Hearing Rule No. 17.

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